



# Photographer Christopher Boffoli's art is a tasty mixture of toys and food

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Christopher Boffoli not only enjoys tasting all types of cuisine. The well-known photographer also likes to point his camera at cereal, doughnuts and other food items.

“Food is such a rich subject for art,” Boffoli told The Park Record during a phone call from his home in Seattle. “Food is often the first part of a foreign culture that many of us experience, so it’s a passport, if you will. It opens doors for discussion about everything: economic policy, class, health, environment and culture.”



Boffoli's exhibit, "Food for Thought," which depicts miniature toy figures interacting in food scenarios, is currently on display at the Kimball Art Center's Uptown Fare cafe gallery.

The exhibit, which is culled from photographs, ranging in size from 12 inches by 18 inches to 24 inches by 36 inches, from a larger series called "Big Appetites," will be shown through March 19.

Some of the photos depict miniature plastic people floating away in a cluster of gumdrops, painting stalks of asparagus and preparing to scuba dive in a cup of tea.

"A lot of people have seen my work online, but I love to do exhibitions because it makes much more of an impression to see these photographs in large format on gallery walls," Boffoli said. "They are printed on metallic paper and the mounting is called acrylic divan where you take a photograph print and put a clear face on it and put on an aluminum alloy backing. It has a clean modern look and the colors are really vibrant."

Boffoli came up with the idea of incorporating toy figures in photographs in 2002, after he saw a diorama exhibit in London at the Saatchi Gallery.

"I wasn't aware at that time that [this was] a type of genre in food photography," he said. "But I was familiar small figures, having been a model railroader when I was a kid."

The concept of scale juxtaposition was also a common theme during Boffoli's childhood in the late 1970s and through the 1980s.

"It was all over advertising with the Keebler Elves, the Jolly Green Giant, the Pillsbury Dough Boy and the Tidy Bowl Man," he said.

It was also in cinema.

"I remember seeing the 'Incredible Shrinking Woman' with Lily Tomlin, 'Innerspace' with Martin Short, and most famously 'Honey, I Shrunk the Kids' with Rick Moranis," Boffoli said. "It also goes back to the 1950s with the cheap special effects in the movies that show tiny people running away from large insects."



The idea even goes back centuries with “Gulliver’s Travels” by Jonathan Swift, published around 1725.

“There has always been a human fascination with miniatures,” Boffoli said. “I’ve been to museums and have seen all of these artifacts that are tiny renditions of things that were big in real life.”

Boffoli’s first photographs weren’t very good, he confessed.

“They were really bad, and nobody, except for my niece, cared about them,” he said with a laugh.

That changed in 2011.

“An editor in Europe saw some of my images and asked if he could syndicate them,” Boffoli said. “After they went into syndication in the British press, they went viral. And within a couple of months, I had galleries and agents calling.”

Nancy Stokes, exhibitions director for the Kimball Art Center, knew about Boffoli’s photographs after living and working in Seattle before coming to Park City.

“Christopher is represented by a great gallery that I worked with,” she said. “I thought this would be the perfect space to present [the photographs].”

Boffoli started taking photographs when he was 15.

“My dad bought me a camera and I started taking pictures on film,” he said. “You had to wait two weeks to get the photos from the photo mat to see what you shot, but that just stayed with me.”

Before he got into photography, Boffoli loved writing.

“I was an English major in college and never had time to study art history,” he said. “I always thought writing was the dominant creative outlet for me, but looking back, I always drew and illustrated things.”



Boffoli worked as a student journalist through college. He started a commercial photography company during his senior year and did all the event photography at his school.

“That was the extent of my photography career then,” he said. “I then entered a career in philanthropy for 12 or 13 years as an education fundraiser that worked with schools such as London School of Economics and Dartmouth College.”

Boffoli was called on assignment to Seattle in 2004 to start a capitol campaign for University of Washington’s law school.

“Shortly after, I was nearly killed in a mountaineering accident on Mount Rainier,” he said. “After I recovered, I took a creative sabbatical and traveled around the world.”

That’s when he decided to start taking more photographs.

“What looks easy is very technical,” Boffoli said. “I’m a clumsy person, and the figures I use are generally about 20mm tall and made of hard plastic. So getting them to stand up and stay in place, especially if the food is soft or wet, is tedious and meticulous and incredibly frustrating.”

To ensure no one can copy his work, Boffoli makes all of the plastic figures himself.

“I use a 3-D printer and hand paint them all,” he said.

In addition, Boffoli faces the challenge of making sure the food looks good in the photographs.

“I didn’t want to use a lot of trickery that is used in commercial food photographs like using glue as substitute for milk and working with glass ice cubes,” he said. “I wanted the food to be authentic and real. And sometimes food doesn’t quite look the same in real life as it does in photography. So, I do a lot of work to make sure the food looks right because there is some great color and texture with food.”



Throughout his career, Boffoli has worked with big brands such as Nestle and Disney for photographic campaigns.

“Editorially, I’ve done covers for the New York Times and the Washington Post and magazine covers for Lucky Peach,” he said.

In 2012, Boffoli was a finalist for the James Beard Foundation Award, and a year later, the James Beard House presented a solo exhibition of his work as well.

Boffoli said he never thought his photography career would be as successful as it is. “I’m essentially using toys and food in my work,” he said. “But these things are common in every culture around the world.”

Christopher Boffoli’s “Food for Thought” exhibit will be on display through March 19 at the Kimball Art Center’s Uptown Fare gallery. Admission is free. For information, visit <http://www.kimballartcenter.org>.